

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

1309 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515-6157

(202) 225-2061

www.house.gov/cha

March 5, 2009

Member Use of the CVC and Staff-Led Tours

Dear Colleague:

We have heard a lot of concern lately regarding the Capitol Visitor Center's accommodation of staff-led tours. We want to assure you that we place the highest priority on ensuring that you can offer personal tours to your constituents, and to that end we have taken the following actions:

- We have directed CVC staff to ensure that staff-led tours will be accommodated throughout the day whenever they arrive at the CVC. While the capacity constraints of the Capitol itself create occasional delays, so far we have been able to keep those delays shorter than they were when staff tours lined up to wait in the Cannon basement.
- We have directed the CVC staff to create additional tour time slots at the beginning and end of the day that would be available to Member offices only.
- We have directed CVC staff to offer more one-day tour training sessions to assist staffers who take constituents on staff-led tours. (Staffers who have not yet received training may conduct tours, but will be asked to sign up for a future training session.)
- We have directed that staff-led tours be allowed to enter the CVC through the Cannon Tunnel as well as through the main entrance, although we do still believe that the main entrance will provide your constituents with the best experience.
- We have reiterated to the CVC staff in the strongest terms the imperative of Member service and the need to accommodate Member requests.

The CVC director has sent out the attached letter explaining their response to these measures. In addition, we would like to provide your staff with more opportunities to learn about CVC practices and discuss tour management with CVC staff. We are offering two discussion sessions in the Committee hearing room – on March 13 and 20 at noon, in 1310 Longworth. No reservations are necessary – please urge your staff to attend.

Furthermore, we urge you to let us know immediately if you have constituent visits planned for the spring peak period and, after consultation with the CVC staff, they could not be accommodated. We will do everything possible to help you find a solution.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Brady
Chairman



Daniel E. Lungren
Ranking Minority Member



Terrie S. Rouse
CEO for Visitor Services

U.S. Capitol Building
Capitol Visitor Center
Washington, D.C. 20515
202-226-8000
www.visitthecapitol.gov

March 6, 2009

Dear Member:

We know that staff-led tours are very important to Members of Congress, and we are doing everything possible to accommodate all requests for staff-led tours. Although we are seeing close to twice the average number of daily visitors to the Capitol when compared to previous years, we have been able to accommodate all staff-led tour requests. Member Offices can access the Advance Reservation System to book tours at least four months in advance of arrival dates. If your office experiences any difficulty when trying to reserve a tour through the Advance Reservation System, you may do the following:

- Call the Office of Visitor Services at (202) 593-1762 to inquire about availability of passes before the day of arrival. Cancellations occur often. Also, we have added additional tour time slots in the morning and afternoon that can be reserved only by Member offices, not the general public. Tour times exclusively for Member offices are at 8:20 a.m., 8:40 a.m., 3:30 p.m., and 3:40 p.m., Monday through Friday. **Call the Office of Visitor Services to book tours for these time slots.**
- On the day of arrival, staff may inquire in person at either information desk in Emancipation Hall for the next available tour. This provides the same immediate availability for staff-led tours that was provided before the Visitor Center opened. It also gives more certainty to visitors and staffers about the timing of their tour when compared with the previous practice of waiting, sometimes for hours, in the Cannon basement. Tours can be accommodated throughout the day due to cancellations and “no shows.”

I would also like to take this opportunity to clarify a few points regarding our Congressional Historical Interpretive Program (CHIP) training. Generally, staffers who lead tours through the Capitol sign up for CHIP training (which can take less than one day), which provides information on Capitol history as well as the required and valuable awareness of emergency procedures and evacuation routes along the tour route. Staffers who have not taken the training have not been restricted from providing tours, but their participation in the training greatly enhances their ability to provide constituents an enjoyable and memorable experience. Equally important, the 1,700 staffers who have already participated in the training have had the opportunity to become more familiar with the Capitol, its history, and are better prepared to share its many amenities and educational opportunities with their constituents.



U.S. CAPITOL
Visitor Center

There also appears to be some confusion regarding the use of the Cannon Tunnel to bring constituent groups to the Capitol. Staff may use the Cannon Tunnel to bring their tour groups to the Visitor Center from the House Office Buildings. They then obtain timed entry passes from the Visitor Center, to ensure an even and steady flow of people through the Capitol and for security officials to have an accurate estimate of how many people are in the building at any one time. Having this information is critical to our ability to adhere to the federal fire code occupancy limits for the Capitol. If staffers have seen the film before, they may leave their groups in the Orientation Theater line and then meet them to begin their tour 15 minutes later upon their group's departure from the theater. Groups may exit through the Cannon Tunnel as well.

From its inception, the Capitol Visitor Center was designed to assist Members in welcoming as many visitors as possible in a secure and comfortable environment that helps enhance the tour of the historic building. During a peak tourism day on February 14, 2009, when close to 10,000 people visited the Capitol, the average wait time to enter the Visitor Center was only six minutes. While we anticipate longer delays during the peak spring season, we expect that we will continue to provide an outstanding experience for your constituents, whether on a staff-led or guide-led tour. Our entire Capitol Visitor Center team stands ready to do everything possible to ensure a pleasurable Capitol experience for your constituents. Please do not hesitate to call our Office of Visitor Services at (202) 593-1762 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terrie S. Rouse', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Terrie S. Rouse
CEO for Visitor Services

cc: Stephen T. Ayers, AIA, Acting Architect of Capitol